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ABSTRACT

Tabular and narrative material highlight accomplishments of a three-year Basic Skills Learning Centers (BSLC) Project, which was designed to provide nonurban elementary schools in 20 western states with materials and technical assistance to improve remedial instruction in reading and mathematics. A section on project structure and history describes planning activities in 1976-77 and project implementation in 1977-78 and 1978-79, when 485 schools in 145 school districts operated over 4,000 BSLC programs. Population descriptions include information on numbers of students served, distribution of instructional staff, and special student characteristics (e.g., family income and ethnicity). A section on pupil progress with respect to grade-by-grade skill acquisition shows that 64% of BSLC students kept up with or caught up to grade-level skills in the first operational year; 74% kept up or caught up in the second year. Projections for 1979-80 show 83% of the participating schools maintaining or increasing their number of BSLC programs even though federal assistance, materials, and money will not be available to support the program. (JH)

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FINAL REPORT

September 30, 1979

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BASIC SKILLS LEARNING CENTERS PROJECT

A Project of the Community Services Administration and SWRL Educational Research and Development

RC 011790

THE BASIC SKILLS LEARNING CENTERS PROJECT

Final Report

September 30, 1979

Submitted to the

Community Services Administration

SWRL

SWRL EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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THE BASIC SKILLS LEARNING CENTERS PROJECT

Final Report

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PREFACE

The Basic Skills Learning Centers (BSLC) Project, funded by the Community Services Administration, reflected the coordinated cooperation of several governmental agencies, educational R&D, and local education agencies to provide needed instructional services. The Project accomplishments demonstrate that its intentions were attained. Moreover, at a total project expenditure of less than $5.00 per pupil per year, the cost of the effort was feasible and manageable. At a time when the media and the public appear increasingly convinced that federal government and professional education initiatives have not worked, the BSLC Project demonstrates clearly that an initiative did accomplish its intentions and on a significant scale, in a significant area, for a significant number of needy children.

This document is the final report of the three-year BSLC Project. The report is organized into three major sections:

- BSLC Project Structure and History
- BSLC Population
- BSLC Accomplishments

Further information on the project may be obtained by writing SWRL:

Technical Assistance
SWRL Educational Research and Development
4665 Lampson Avenue
Los Alamitos, CA 90720

The Basic Skills Learning Centers Project involved the following communities:

Arizona
Flagstaff
Kingman
Page
Pollaca
Prescott
Second Mesa
Window Rock

California
Chowchilla
Hilmar
Los Banos
Madera
Merced
Needles
Rowland Heights

Colorado
Delta
Durango
Eaton
Fort Lupton
Grand Junction
Montrose
Pagosa Springs
Silverton
Telluride

Idaho
Caldwell
Emmett
Horseshoe Bend
Kuna
McCall
Meridian
Nampa
Weiser

Kansas
Atchison
Burlington
Chanute
Coffeyville
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Independence
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Parsons
Pittsburg
Scranton

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Jena
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Shelton
Port Orchard
Tenwater

Wyoming
Casper
Cheyenne
Laramie
Rawlins
Saratoga

THE BASIC SKILLS LEARNING CENTERS PROJECT

Sponsored by: The Community Services Administration, Washington, DC

Conducted by: SWRL Educational Research & Development, Los Alamitos, CA

BSLC PROJECT STRUCTURE AND HISTORY

The Basic Skills Learning Center (BSLC) Project was funded by the United States Community Services Administration (CSA) to provide nonurban elementary schools in 20 western states with material resources and technical assistance, through SWRL, to strengthen their efforts in providing remediation in basic reading and mathematics instruction for individual pupils in need of such help.

The first project year, the 1976-77 school year, involved the selection of and project participation agreement by 145 school districts and 485 schools. During this school year, these districts and schools were provided with planing materials (BSLC District and School Planning Kits) to configure learning centers to meet their particular remedial instruction needs in reading and mathematics. The initial planning materials were distributed through and supported by 25 BSLC orientation meetings conducted by SWRL throughout the 20 state region during the spring of 1977.

A learning center is a particular mix of project materials as defined by a particular school or teacher to meet local needs and requirements. Instructional resources include 12 different instructional kits, six each in reading and mathematics, containing primarily the basic skills content taught in grades one through six. The instructional resources are accompanied by an integrated set of operations resources which include placement, posttesting, and record keeping materials.

During the spring of 1977, schools completed their BSLC plans for the upcoming 1977-78 school year. These completed plans were sent to SWRL, and SWRL, in response, shipped the required instructional kits and operations materials to the schools. Schools then established and operated their learning centers during the 1977-78 school year.

During the spring of 1978, SWRL conducted 20 mid-project meetings throughout the Project region. These meetings were designed to exchange BSLC experiences and to explain second year planning materials and procedures. The spring 1978 BSLC planning materials provided a focused review of the year's BSLC activities and accomplishments in order to refine, extend, or modify BSLC for the upcoming 1978-79 school year. Again, these plans were sent to SWRL, when completed by the Project districts, and SWRL, in response, shipped the instructional and operational materials necessary for the third Project year (1978-79) to the schools.

Throughout Project operation, SWRL interacted with Project districts and schools through a variety of channels which included a telephone hotline for ongoing technical assistance and a series of BSLC Bulletins (Project newsletters), in addition to the orientation and mid-project meetings. Further, SWRL collected both planning and accomplishment information throughout the Project's operation. The planning information was collected as part of the spring planning process. Accomplishment information was collected via special questionnaires and other procedures.

The BSLC planning and accomplishment information served three major purposes. First, the information was synthesized and presented to participants at various points throughout the Project in computer-generated reports with accompanying interpretation guides. These reports kept participants informed of Project progress, verified their own Project accomplishments, and provided an information source for Project decisions.

Second, the information was used for research purposes to look at issues such as dissemination, implementation, instruction, testing, etc. This inquiry is a key aspect in the development and transfer of educational technology. As the BSLC Project benefited from such previous SWRL research, the information gained from the BSLC experience will, in turn, benefit future efforts by SWRL and other agencies and organizations. The interagency agreement between the Community Services Administration and the National Institute of Education effectively facilitated this interactive R&D.

Third, the information was collated and synthesized with all other Project information into a series of quarterly reports to CSA. Additionally, the information was used in the Project annual reports which were distributed to CSA, Project districts, SEAs, and other parties interested in the accomplishments of Project schools.

The remainder of this report summarizes the scope and nature of Project operations and accomplishments. Since the Project involved direct student participation during two school years (1977-78 and 1978-79), the summary focuses on this period. Additional detail is found in the quarterly progress reports to CSA, the 1977 and 1978 annual reports, and in the reports of NIE-sponsored research conducted in conjunction with Project operations.

BSLC POPULATION

During the total period of operation, the BSLC Project involved 20 states, 147 school districts, and 564 schools. District and school participation figures are summarized in Table 1, which also shows the percentage change in participation from the first to the second year of school implemenation.

Table 1

District and School Participation in the BSLC Project

	Districts		Schools	
	No.	% Change	No.	% Change
Total 1977-78 Participation	**145**	**—**	**488**	**—**
Dropped Out at End of 1977-78	**3**	**-2%**	**21**	**-4%**
Joined for 1978-79	**2**	**+1%**	**76**	**+15%**
Total 1978-79 Participation	**144**	**-1%**	**543**	**+11%**

BSLC schools had a total enrollment of approximately 187,000 pupils the first year and 208,000 pupils the second year. Nearly 100,000 of these pupils received BSLC instruction each year. Further, over 4,000 centers were in operation during each of the two years. Each year approximately 6,500 people staffed the learning centers operated by BSLC schools. The staff breakdown is as follows:

Type of Staff	Percent of Total	
	1977-78	1978-79
Teacher/Specialist	68.3%	66.5%
Paid Aides	21.6%	24.4%
Volunteers	10.1%	9.1%

As can be seen there was no appreciable change in the staffing of centers over the two years of school implementation.

BSLC Population Demographics

The target population defined by CSA for the BSLC Project was nonurban elementary schools in 20 western states. Beyond this, the Project was also aimed at serving pupils from low income families. The data below indicate that the participant selection process did indeed access the target population as defined by CSA.

Family income. BSLC schools have an estimated median family income of $9,926. Though median family income data are not immediately available for the BSLC 20-state region, the national and regional values given in Table 2 provide some indication of the relative standing of BSLC schools. The BSLC median value of $9,926 is below the United States total ($12,686), the U.S. nonmetropolitan area total ($10,980) and the West Census Region total ($13,038). Roughly 88% of the BSLC schools' median family income is in the $5,000 to $15,000 range as compared to roughly only 40% in the comparative areas. Likewise, for BSLC schools, only 1% are in the *greater than $15,000* range as compared to 34 and 43% in the comparative areas.

Table 2

Family Income

Income Levels	United States[a]	Non-Metropolitan Areas[a]	West[a,b]	BSLC Project Schools
less than $4,999	17.9%	21.3%	16.9%	11.0%
$5,000 - 9,999	21.4%	24.0%	21.0%	43.0%
$10,000 - 14,999	19.1%	20.6%	18.7%	45.0%
greater than $15,000	41.7%	34.1%	43.4%	1.0%
Median	$12,686	$10,980	$13,038	$9,926

[a]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports,* Series P-60, No. 109, 1977.

[b]The West Census Region included the non-BSLC Project states of Alaska and Hawaii and excludes the BSLC Project states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Missouri, and Minnesota.

ESEA Title I eligibility. Eighty-one percent of the BSLC schools are eligible for ESEA Title I funds. Because Title I is intended to aid areas of high concentration of pupils from low-income families, the 81% eligibility figure is consistent with the preceding relatively low median family income figure of $9,926.

Per pupil expenditure. The average expenditure per elementary school pupil across the BSLC districts is $1,150 compared to the BSLC 20-state regional average of $1,192 and the United States average of $1,299. The differences between BSLC Project districts' expenditures and the regional and national figures—$52 and $159, respectively—represent a substantial amount of educational dollars per pupil. Though the differences are conservative estimates,[1,2] the direction of the difference is consistent with other *financial* indicators of the BSLC participants.

Ethnicity. As can be seen in Table 3, BSLC schools contain a larger percentage enrollment of nonwhite and nonblack pupils than is present in the BSLC 20-state region. Though the BSLC Project school enrollment is primarily white, the percentage of white pupils enrolled, 74%, is less than the BSLC 20-state regional population percentage of 89%. Further, the enrollment of whites in centers within schools drops to 67%. The difference is accounted for by the successive, increasing inclusion of other races—Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American—into project participation at the school and center level. The black enrollment percentage reflects the regional percentage. The enrollment pattern of pupils within centers was stable across the two years of school operation.

Other special pupil characteristics. Of the pupils involved in the BSLC Project, 8.2% were special education pupils (i.e., intellectually handicapped, such as EMR, EMH, etc.). As reported by their teachers, 6.8% of the pupils were of limited-English-speaking ability. And, 7.7% were transient pupils (i.e., missed a substantial portion of BSLC instruction because they either entered school after the start of BSLC instruction or left school before the completion of BSLC instruction).

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[1]Grant, W. V., & Lind, C. G. *Digest of educational statistics: 1976 edition* (NLES 77-401). Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977.

[2]U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Current population reports,* series P-60, No. 109, 1977.

Table 3

Ethnicity of BSLC Pupils

Ethnic Category	% of Project States Population[a,b]	% of Pupils in BSLC Schools	% of Pupils in Centers 1977-78	% of Pupils in Centers 1978-79
Black	8	7	9	8
Other Ethnic Groups	3	19	24	24[d]
(Hispanic American)	(NA)[c]	(12)	(15)	(16)
(Asian American)	(NA)	(1)	(1)	(1)
(Native American)	(NA)	(6)	(8)	(8)
White	89	74	67	68

[a]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1977.*

[b]Ethnicity distributions as of July 1, 1975.

[c]NA: breakdown of Other Ethnic Groups was Not Available.

[d]Breakdown in parentheses totals 25% because of rounding.

BSLC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Pupil Attainment Test Results

Substantial proportions of BSLC pupils attained high levels of performance on BSLC Pupil Attainment Tests, which are end-of-kit tests and represent the common core curriculum of grades 1-6. Further, this substantial accumulation of high scores attained by BSLC pupils in basic skills was repeated in both operational years of the Project. Indeed, Figure 1 shows that the score distributions for the two years are nearly identical, with an increase in the number of near-perfect scores the second year. The median values for each year were 83% in reading and 88% in mathematics. That is, on these 40-item tests, the majority of pupils received scores of 32 correct (80%) or better on the reading tests and 35 correct (87.5%) or better on the mathematics tests.

Remedial Progress

At the end of each school year, BSLC teachers reported on the remedial progress of BSLC pupils using the following categories:

- **Catching Up**—Pupils completing assigned sections of *more than one* BSLC kit this year (or more than one-half of the Basic Reading Skills kit) have attained more skills than are typically attained by most pupils during a school year. They have begun to *catch up* with respect to grade-by-grade progress.

- **Keeping Up**—Pupils completing all assigned sections of *one* entire BSLC kit this year (or one-half of the BRS kit) have by that accomplishment managed to *keep up* with respect to typical grade-by-grade skill progress.

- **Losing Ground**—Pupils completing *less than one* BSLC kit (or half of the BRS kit) this year may still be *losing ground* with respect to typical grade-by-grade skill progress.

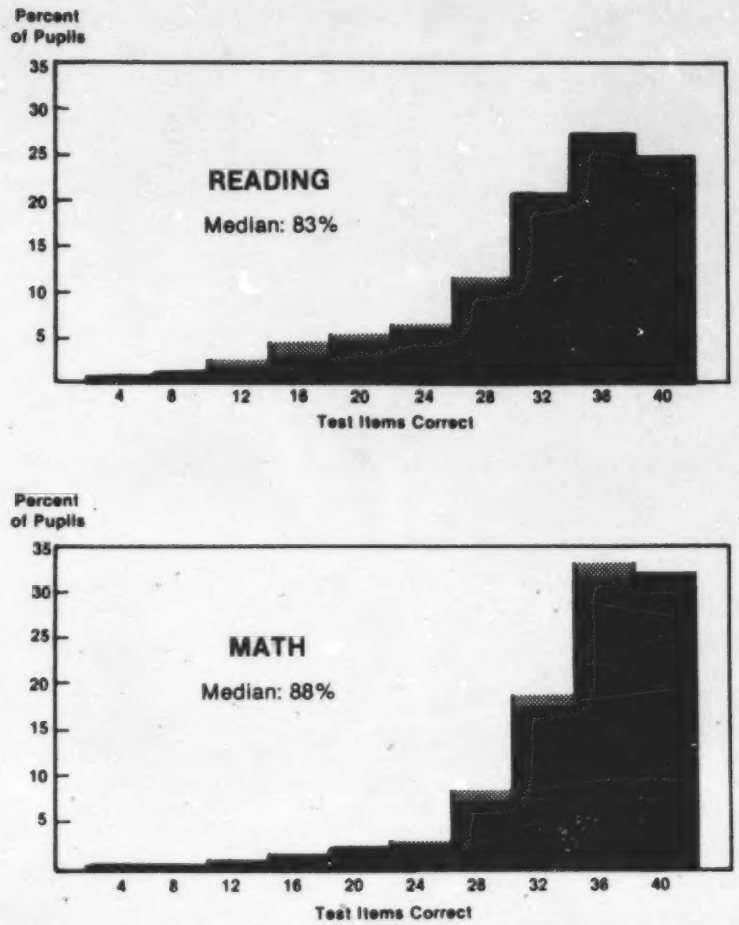

Figure 1
Distribution of BSLC Pupil Attainment Test Scores

Pupils develop remediation needs by not keeping up with grade-by-grade progress. Therefore, for *remedial* pupils classified in the *keeping up* or *catching up* progress category, the slippage on grade-by-grade progress has been halted (keeping up) or reversed (catching up). Table 4 shows the percentage of pupils in each progress category for each year. At the conclusion of the first year, 64% of the pupils were classified as either *catching up* or *keeping up*. The second operational year 74% of the pupils were so classified by completing all assigned sections of one entire BSLC kit or more.

Table 4

Percent of Pupils in Center in Each Progress Category

Progress Category	Percent of Pupils in Center		
	1977-78 School Year	1978-79 School Year	Percent Change
Catching Up	23	33	+ 10%
Keeping Up[a]	41	40	-1%
Losing Ground	36	27	-9%

[a]It should be noted that the *keeping up* category is defined very restrictively—completing **one** kit. Pupils almost completing one kit, but not quite, would be included in the *losing ground* category according to the above definitions.

Further, important gains in the proportion of BSLC pupils classified as *caught up* were found. *Caught up* is defined as completing all needed BSLC instruction and no longer needing remedial instruction in BSLC. In reading 18% were so classified after the first operational year and 19% after the second. In mathematics these percentages moved from 21% the first year to 23% the second.

BSLC School Goal Setting

During the spring of each operational year, BSLC schools reviewed their progress and set goals for the following school year. SWRL provided planning resources for this process. These resources were organized around the following three questions which are central to any program of remediation in basic skills:

1. **Pupil Participation:** Are all of your pupils needing remedial instruction receiving BSLC kit instruction during this school year?

2. **Appropriateness of Remedial Instruction:** Is the BSLC kit placement for these pupils appropriate, i.e., does the instruction appear to teach the skills needed, without being *too easy* or *too hard*?

3. **Pupil Progress:** Will the pupils receiving BSLC instruction this year make reasonable progress, i.e., will they complete all assigned sections of at least one BSLC kit?

In reviewing the issues related to these three questions, BSLC schools themselves set objectives for the 1978-79 and 1979-80 school year as shown in Table 5.

The objectives that were most frequently indicated by schools for the 1978-79 school year dealt with organizing Centers and beginning instruction earlier in the year. To a large extent this goal was realized in that the average start date for Centers the second year was two weeks earlier than for the first year. Given all that a school must do to get instruction started each new school year, a two-week advance is a substantial achievement.

For the 1979-80 school year a majority of the schools plan to give pupils in need of remedial instruction priority over other pupils. As can be seen from Table 5, all of the remaining objectives decreased in frequency for the 1979-80 school year. This is an encouraging result in that it indicates that the implementation *problems* experienced during the first year of operation have been to a large extent reduced or resolved by a great majority of the schools.

Table 5

BSLC School Goal Setting

Pupil Participation

Objectives Set by Schools	Percent of Schools 1978-79	1979-80
Assign more pupils to BSLC instruction in existing Centers.	49%	33%
Give pupils needing remedial instruction priority over other pupils.	47%	53%

Appropriateness of Remedial Instruction

Objectives Set by Schools	Percent of Schools 1978-79	1979-80
Improve placement procedures	49%	27%
Redistribute BSLC kits among Centers.	52%	38%
Allocate more staff time for BSLC instruction.	39%	18%
Reassign pupils to Centers.	47%	41%

Projected Progress

Objectives Set by Schools	Percent of Schools 1978-79	1979-80
Organize Centers earlier in the year (by September 15 on the average for both years).	63%	36%
Place pupils and begin BSLC instruction earlier in the year (by September 23 and September 20 on the average for the first and second years, respectively; the average Center start date for the first year of operations was October 29 compared to October 14 for the second year).	60%	36%
Schedule and conduct BSLC instruction on a regular basis.	47%	29%
Allocate more staff time for BSLC instruction.	33%	20%
Give pupils in need of remedial instruction priority over other pupils.	44%	50%
Avoid interruptions of regularly scheduled BSLC instruction.	27%	21%

Further, even though schools will not be receiving direct project support during the 1979-80 school year, 83% of the schools indicated that they plan to keep or increase the number of BSLC Centers. As indicated in Table 6, the net change in the number of Centers is expected to be -1%. Because schools will be operating the BSLC component without additional SWRL (i.e., federal) assistance, materials, or money, a decrease of only 1% is highly encouraging.

Table 6

Post-Project Plans

Change from Second Year (1978-79)	% of Schools	% of Change
Decrease the number of Centers	17%	-11%
Keep the number of Centers the same	59%	—
Increase the number of Centers	24%	+10%
Net change in Centers		-1%

* * * * *

In sum, the BSLC Project was highly successful by every indicator. It did bring needed instructional help to a significant number of needy pupils through the coordinated efforts of local school and district planners, teachers, and SWRL/CSA supplied resources. Further, the Project demonstrates that various educational and governmental agencies can cooperatively work together to effect school improvement.